1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

[351] 794 tree tomato bushes, chilli bushes, onions, etc. inside the monastery precincts; but for the greater part of his food he is dependent on gifts from the villagers. The holder of this office was a very old man called Pong-ring, born in 1852; he was very feeble, half blind, suffered from polyps which made him almost incomprehensible even to the Lepchas, and his body was covered with the most revolting open sores. To accommodate our staff he had been turned out of his house and was taken as a boarder by the next nearest house, the owner of which, Jiroong, could trace a very distant relationship with him. In his very old age he was abnormally pious, hardly moving without his personal prayer wheel. He had never received proper religious instruction and could not read (or go through the motions of reading); his devotions were limited to those of the uninstructed and usually illiterate nuns and a number of rather unkind jokes, considering his age and feebleness, were made about his position as head of the female congregation. As an [868] old man past his work, unable to support himself and without children, he was not respected by the other Lepchas, most of whom felt, as I did, that he would be better dead; and some of the rather heartless children used to call out to him 'Why don't you die now while the Europeans are here, so that they can see your funeral?'. He was constantly having attacks of illness, but always recovered, to my, I hope, disguised distress; he was a very unpleasant spectacle and neighbour, and I should have liked to have seen the funeral of a lama, which I was not able to do.

351 At the back of the monastery the wooded hill goes up steeply to some cultivated land and a small group of houses. To the west is a small open alp with a few fruit trees in it, and beyond that slightly rising ground, this year not cultivated, and then about half a mile or more away another group of four houses.

iii

621 The monastery is almost exactly in the middle of Lingthem. Of the 33 houses 14 are above the monastery and the rest below, 14 to the east and the rest to the west. There are five groups of four houses each, one of three, and the rest either isolated or in pairs.

342 Lepcha houses are rectangular buildings raised about four feet off the ground on stone piles which go round three sides of the building; the east side is left open, and the space underneath serves as a shelter at night for domestic animals. The building

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

CHAPTER SIX

THE RULES OF KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE

i

When a Lepcha speaks of 'we' he generally means all the people of his village. But besides these geographical divisions Lepchas are divided up into other groups by birth and marriage; these groups are the patrilineal clan, or *ptso*, and the immediate and extended family. Unlike their neighbours, the Nepali, the Lepchas have a very small number of kinship terms;[1] fewer even than we have, for they exclude all the category of cousins, and, except for the mother's brothers, make no distinction between the paternal and maternal lines. For people younger than the speaker, too, they do not make any distinction of sex; the same word is used for a younger brother or a younger sister, for a son or a daughter, for a nephew or a niece. Only in the case of children's spouses are different words used for son-in-law and daughter-in-law.

Old age is considered by the Lepchas to be a desirable quality; the polite term of address to anybody you are not related to is 'old man'; and there is a tendency to push anybody older than the speaker into a higher generation. Thus, when a man has had a child he calls his wife's parents 'grandfather' and 'grandmother', and the parents call their own elder brothers and sisters 'father' and 'mother'; the wife's elder brother, or her elder sister's husband (and conversely) are equated with her father. The opposite tendency is also manifested towards the wives of younger brothers (the elder brother calls them 'daughters-in-law') and the husbands of younger sisters (the elder sister calls them 'sons-in-law'). In the joint family which dwells under a single roof only nine terms are normally used: 'grandfather', 'grandmother,' 'father',

[1] A complete list of Lepcha kinship terms and other common forms of address are given in Appendix II.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

Sexual experiment And adventure marriage

and children follow in due course, but the Lepcha man is still growing up till about the age of thirty-six. At that period his responsibilities are liable to be heaviest; his parents will be retiring from the management of affairs, and he will have, if he is lucky, a number of young children to look after. As his sons grow up and become capable adults in their turn he is able to withdraw somewhat from work; if he is intelligent he is a *yeum-bu*—a man who knows—and as such will be often asked for his advice by the Mandal and by his juniors. If he retains his health and prosperity as he grows older, and if his children and grand-children are still alive he acquires a sort of talismanic virtue; younger men will take valuable presents to so fortunate an old man in order to get in return either his drinking cup or his rosary and to share a meal of rice with him, in order to acquire the desirable qualities of this prosperous great-grandfather. But if an old man survives his children and loses his capacity to work his position is an unenviable one; he too, like the young child, consumes more than he produces; he is a nuisance, not respected or listened to, treated at best with casual deference. For the Lepchas the normal span of life is four score years; until that age a man or woman should be capable of doing sufficient work to keep himself; those that survive longer are a misery to themselves and everybody else.

With one extremely important exception the curve of a woman's life follows that of the man's. Except for the accident of death there are no breaks or sudden transitions in a man's life; for the majority of women there is the geographical transfer to her husband's home; although the marriage customs soften this as much as possible it represents a psychological change for a woman which has no parallel in the life of a man. It is probably for this reason that young married women appear so much more self-possessed and grown-up than their husbands. A man who stays in his own community is perpetually classified as weaker, or younger, or stupider than his elders or contemporaries; a woman in a new village is free from such comparisons and takes her place according to her own merits and abilities. A woman of twenty takes her full rôle in the group of adult women; a man of thirty is still somewhat bashful and is inclined to hide behind the knowledge and experience of his elders.

The undulations on the curve of Lepcha life are the alternations of plenty and scarcity, of feasting and everyday life. There is no absolute contrast between plenty and scarcity, between a feast and an ordinary meal; it is a question of quantity rather than quality.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

Perhaps the least disruptive death is that of the wife; after a year's obligatory mourning the husband can re-marry. But a dead man is irreplaceable, and it is the death of men which destroys the expectations of the Lepchas. Thus Patek by the deaths of his father and grandfather was left the head of a household of six at the age of seventeen, and Tobgé was left alone with a wife and a young child at the age of twenty. Tobgé's case, however, was less desperate, for he was able to abandon his lonely home and go to live with Jiroong, his father's younger brother, who had previously been a *komok myok* and had therefore a separate establishment of his own.

At the other end of the scale there is old Kahlyeu who had two wives and twelve children; but all his sons died young and his daughters married away; and so at the age of seventy-seven, instead of living a life of ease, supported by his children and grandchildren, he has to work hard and lives alone with his grandson Chélé and the middle-aged widow of one of his brother's sons. His brother's family is settled in a distant village some way away. Kahlyeu is a rather melancholy, unhappy old man, but one of the shrewdest in the village. 'Times have changed', he complained once to me when I was asking about earlier conditions, 'since I was a boy; nowadays the youngsters know more than I do, and if I start telling them about the old times they rebuke me saying: "Why talk about that? It is all over and done with."' Similarly ninety-year-old Serving, almost completely in his dotage, without teeth and half-blind, has survived all his descendants and nearly all the members of his *ptso*, a century ago the most important in Lingthem; now he lives with the grandson of his elder brother, a rude and ungracious man, with his wife and baby son. Death, which has been so unmerciful in taking the young men has been equally unmerciful in letting these old lonely and unhappy men survive.

[p. 344 is blank]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

special Lama would come and meditate alone in this completely darkened room. He would sometimes intone for hours at a stretch, accompanying his prayers on the cymbals and drum. After several hours of this rhythmical banging one's nerves would come near to breaking point. The only thing then was to go for a solitary walk. This particular form of devotion is known as *Kongso Klong*, or the "sending away of Devils," and this was the name we eventually gave to its chief exponent. I later discovered that our presence in the monastery was thought to call for redoubled efforts in this direction, but I was not prepared for what happened on the day of my final departure. On this occasion Kongso Klong appeared before me with the usual present of eggs. I thought he had merely come to say good-bye, and was somewhat astonished when the others told me that he demanded ten rupees "for services rendered." This I paid.

Between the Kongso room and our bedroom was a short passage, which contained a large open fire-place for cooking. This was identical with that in the ordinary living house, but during our time it was never used. For dining-room we had a tent. This was pitched outside the small house adjoining the monastery, which served both as kitchen and living quarters for our servants. It was normally occupied by Pong Ring, a snuffling old gentleman and almost blind. He was a sort of verger and was supposed to keep the monastery clean and to tend its tiny garden. All this, however, was far beyond him and he seldom appeared. Sometimes on sunny days he would drag himself painfully down and would totter senilely round the building, at the same time turning his prayer-wheel and wheezing like a pug. When he felt up to it he would take a turn at the giant drums and his accompanying prayers sounded to me like the swarming of bees. Everyone treated him kindly; but the poor old man had outlived his time. He said he had once had a wife, but never a child to look after him in his extreme old age. Sometimes, when we were talking to others, he would pause in his circumambulations and stare

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

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Pong Ring, the mohastery verger.

Grandmother, with the evening's supply of drinks.

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[facing p. 22]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

gggat us with his rheumy eyes. His brain was too far gone to take in much of what was said and after making a remark, which was a sinister meaningless croak rather than human speech, he would totter off again to add a few more turns to his credit. He always reminded me of a desiccated old colonel: perhaps in some previous incarnation he had snored away long hours in some comfortable London club. Anyhow, I like to think so.

136 Lingtem Monastery has no permanent inmates. It does, however, harbour large colonies of rats and fleas. I thought at first that the nightly scufflings might be some form of psychic disturbance; and as for the fleas, once one had been thoroughly bitten they ceased to cause further annoyance.

133 The view from the monastery is, in my opinion, unparalleled anywhere in the Himalaya. The building faces due north, and directly in front of us, on the far side of the river, was a splendidly wooded ridge, the top of which was still under snow when we first arrived. Away to the left we had an uninterrupted view of the Kinchinjunga peaks, with the top of Seniolchum just visible a little to one side. This in itself was a sufficiently remarkable sight: but away to the right we also had a clear view of all the peaks forming the boundary between Sikkim and Tibet. In the centre of those was Pau-hunri, here called Nahrem Hlo, and thought [823] to be the loom of Nazong Nyu, a mythical personage who appears in many Lepcha stories.

[788] Outside the monastery was a row of prayer-flags, and a 351 number of small prayer-drums had been let into one of the walls. These could be turned by the pious whenever they circled round the building. A little below was a small bamboo grove, which contained one particularly handsome tree, which I would sometimes watch for hours at a stretch, [322] especially when the weather was stormy. Why, I wondered, [137] do we use the wood of this most beautiful of all trees to make the most hideous of all furniture? The Lepcha uses a great deal of bamboo in one way and another, but in his hands the finished product never looks shoddy and ugly. On

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

two, but, so his son says, spends most of his nights with the senior.

Mrs. Chötembu number one, like her mother, is a Mun, but is mainly in request as a singer of songs, of which she has an immense repertoire. I once came across the family working in the fields and asked her to give us a tune. I think she misunderstood my meaning; for it was only when I told her that I was really a *Ge-lug-pa*, or celibate monk, that she finally left me alone: but it took some months to convince her. I should add, however, that her advances were always made in public and caused much amusement to the rest of the family.

* * * * *

Datoop is the elder son of the senior Dorje Lopön. Until relieved by Lumbar he acted as Chötembu for over three years, and is now awaiting advancement to the rank of Umzet. As a boy he spent some years in Gangtok, where he was trained as a carpenter, at which trade he is still employed. He superintends most local building, and with the assistance of the *Hlaribu*, or artist, made most of the woodwork in the Lingtem monastery. He was married at nineteen to a girl seven years his junior, but the pair did not live together until after his return from Gangtok, some five years later. He becomes almost heated when discussing his father's affairs, but thinks it unlikely that he will marry again, since "he is now too old for that sort of thing." He says he would rather live in some place like Gangtok, "where there are people to see and gossip to hear; bazaars to walk in and all sorts of things to buy; but what can one do? Town life is easy, since one does not work in the fields: but without work in the fields money is not forthcoming, so it is better to stay at home." Datoop thinks it good to die rich, since then one's children can do the death ceremony in a proper manner. It would be nice to live to eighty, as up to that age most men can still work in the fields: but to live on till a hundred is definitely staying too long. One does not want to be a burden to others.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

coming when they were invited, and begging them now to go away. On those occasions when singing is called for it is nearly always the Mun who sing, and they possess a considerable repertoire of more or less sacred songs. All these songs are in the minor key, more or less rhythmic, with a great stressing of the last syllable of each line, which is prolonged for several notes, usually in a descending scale. The tunes are not set, and allow of easy improvisation. Songs are often sung at feasts, and always at marriages; they are always unaccompanied. The bamboo flutes which some young men make and play are used entirely as a solitary diversion.

iv

The services of the Mun are continuously necessary in the life of every Lepcha. They must always be present at birth, at marriage they are the only essential priests, and at the death of laymen their rôle is of more emotional importance than the lamas. Throughout life they are necessary for cleansing from supernatural danger, for blessing and solemnising different undertakings, and, above all, for expelling devils.

Ceremonial cleansing is performed by *pék*-ing, by the Mun waving certain objects over the actual or potential sufferer. The objects waved differ with the circumstances; thus in the fifth month of pregnancy both parents are *pék* with a bunch of elephant grass to insure an easy delivery: if labour is difficult the mother in childbirth is *pék* with a live chicken, and, if she or her husband have neglected a pre-natal precaution, with the object which has been wrongly handled or finished. Similarly after an abortion or still-born child has been thrown into the river, a Mun will *pék* the carriers with a bunch of stinging and thorny plants and the parents will be *pék* with a live animal which will later be sacrificed, in order to prevent the devil which has caused one death causing more. *Pék*-ing is employed in a number of circumstances, sometimes alone, and sometimes as part of an exorcism. It is the nearest approach in Lepcha life to ritual cleansing.

Blessings are invoked and pacts solemnised by the ritual of *sakyou faat*, the pouring or drinking of strained *chi* from a cup on the sides of which dabs of butter have been placed. It is not absolutely essential that Mun perform this ritual; any old and experienced man who has received *loong* may do so. *Sakyou faat* cannot be offered by women, except by women Mun inside their own homes, by lamas, or by people in mourning. The ceremony is performed to solemnise a marriage, to set up the ~~ingaay~~ relation, to mark the formal swearing of an oath or before starting any unusual undertaking.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

243 A small domestic ceremony, such as we witnessed this evening, is performed after any planting of crops; but the most important one is that carried out when all planting for the year is over. This is known as *Sunkyo Fut*, as is the ceremony performed at harvest time, when *chi* and various sorts of grain are offered to the gods, as in our own Harvest Festival. If necessary the three ceremonies may be telescoped into one; in which case the time selected is the rice harvest, since this is, in any case, the most important ceremony.

Most of the people we had seen working in the fields were present in Jiroong's house this evening. The ceremony was performed by a Mun, but this is not essential: the householder can do it just as well. We sat about a bit before anything happened and were given the usual *chi* to drink. Later on, a brass plate was put down in front of the Mun, in the centre of which was a small wooden drinking-cup, decorated as usual with a smear of butter round its rim and containing the special ceremonial mixture of *chi* and various grains. On the old man's left was a bowl of incense, of [314] juniper, I think. The Mun exhorted the gods to give a good harvest, and urged them to cause no damage by rain or hail. Later, he called on the insects and birds and implored them to do no damage. From time to time, in the course of his exhortations, he took a little of the *chi* up in a piece of banana leaf and sprinkled it on the floor. When the ceremony was over this leaf was handed to another old man, who took it and threw it away outside. At the same time Jiroong's wife came and removed the tray, and as she did so she finished off the remains of the ceremonial *chi*. While the ceremony was [781 888 857] still in progress old Pong-ring wanted to go outside. He is old and feeble and nearly blind. A small boy at once got up and, without being told, helped the old man out, and later brought him in again.

243 533 As soon as the Mun had finished the ceremony Jiroong sang what sounded like a hymn, after which his sister gave us another. These songs are always sung on these occasions and are invocations to the gods to look after the crops.